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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: MAESTRO TV GETS NATIONAL BROADCAST LICENSE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary/Comment: On July 3, the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC) granted pro-opposition Maestro TV's request for a ten-year satellite broadcasting license. This license will allow Maestro to broadcast nationwide. The decision was delayed for roughly a month by the GNCC due to failure to gain a quorum to hold a binding vote. Maestro TV news editor Natia Mikiashvili expressed her satisfaction with the result to Poloff and said that Maestro TV would start broadcasting their signal via satellite as soon as it had sufficient funding. Mikiashvili said that she did not anticipate any further regulatory problems and that Maestro TV was negotiating with Turksat, a Turkish satellite to provide service. The satellite license is another positive step to promote a more pluralistic television media environment throughout Georgia rather than in specific enclaves. Maestro TV will almost assuredly find funding from non-parliamentary opposition coffers to be up and running quickly, though the immediate political impact will likely be much less than non-parliamentary opposition leaders expect. End Summary/Comment.

What This Means - In Concrete Terms

¶2. (C) As a result of the license, Maestro TV will be available to all Georgians who want to receive its broadcasts provided they purchase a satellite dish and receiver. The cost of a dish, installation, and satellite broadcasts (which carry Georgian, Turkish and some other local feeds for a term of a year) is approximately 220-260 GEL (roughly 130-155 USD) which puts it well within the budgets of the average Georgian family. Maestro TV can now bypass cable providers who in many cases did not carry Maestro TV's broadcasting as part of their cable package. Maestro still faces the challenge of reaching viewers who subscribe to regional cable TV, but in principle Maestro programming should be widely available to any Georgian who wants it.

¶3. (C) The non-parliamentary opposition has made the Maestro satellite license a major issue and the granting of the license would seem to ameliorate concerns about access to non-governmental broadcast sources of information. Maestro TV now must seek funding from independent sources to be able to pay for the costs incurred by transmitting a satellite signal. (Embassy Note: Mikiashvili puts the cost at roughly USD 20,000 to set up the signal. End Note.) Maestro TV has been funded by Nino Burjanadze in the past and will likely solicit funds from non-parliamentary opposition leaders and supporters to be able to broadcast nation-wide. In private, non-parliamentary opposition leaders often mentioned granting Maestro TV its satellite license as an example of something within the GoG's control that could be done as a sign of good faith. Over the weekend, the non-parliamentary opposition has made little or no public comment on the license issue probably meaning the non-parliamentary opposition does not intend to use the event as an impetus to enter any sort of larger dialogue with the GoG. Having been accused of political bad faith for the delay in granting the license, the GoG has also been muted on the issue, simply allowing the news to stand on its own merit.

